THE CHAPLAIN AS LEADER

Chaplain (LTC) Jerry R. Young

One of the most universal cravings of our time is the hunger for compelling and creative leadership. - James MacGregor Burns

INTRODUCTION

His voice was calm as he described his first year of pastoral ministry. It was his first assignment as the leading pastor of a congregation, and there had been a number of satisfying experiences. But the telephone could not mask his exasperation, as he told a story of systematic exclusion from the role of leadership. Indignation was now creeping into his voice. "I finally told them!," he said. "I felt as though I were little more than a chaplain!"

The real tragedy of our conversation, it seems to me, was the excellent meaning conveyed by the word "chaplain." I knew exactly what he meant. He was a ceremonial figure. At pre-determined times, he could be expected to lead religious services. In specified social environments, he could

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be expected to pray. Baptisms, weddings, hospital visits, funerals - all were clearly within his domain. But the councils of power did not welcome his voice. He was a religious prostitute. He turned off his feelings, and performed a service. His role was performance, not participation. Spectatorship, not leadership.

Perhaps it is not proper for chaplains to lead in realms not religious. Perhaps the military environment will not allow chaplains to lead. Questions such as these are valid challenges clamoring for attention. This monograph is designed to add questions, not answer them. It is designed to be philosophical in tone, questioning in spirit. It is an objection to the common perception that chaplains are not leaders.

As one might expect, my objection has three points and a prayer. First, I intend to focus attention on the false images of leadership in America today. Second, I intend to ponder the potential for leadership that is available to chaplains, regardless of systemic obstructions. And finally, I intend to suggest primary avenues of approach to the development of leadership among chaplains, in order that we may help to satisfy the "hunger for compelling and creative leadership."[1]

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[1]James MacGregor Burns, Leadership, (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 1.

THEY DO IT WITH MIRRORS

Now all the youth of England are on fire,
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies.
Now thrive the armorers, and honor's thought
Reigns solely in the breast of every man.
They sell the pasture now to buy the horse,
Following the mirror of all Christian kings
With winged heels, as English Mercuries.

- King Henry V, II, Chorus

More than one young man has been fooled by false images, and sold the pasture in order to buy the horse. How disappointing to learn that wings do not grow on heels after all, and that Christian kings were not all that they are cracked up to be. The heroic image of leadership is pervasive in America today, and it cripples our efforts to establish this critical element in American institutions. According to the heroic image:

1. A good leader always knows what is going on,

2. He has more technical expertise than others,

3. He is able to solve any problem, and

4. He is the primary person responsible for how the organization is working.[1]

It should not surprise us that, given this kind of definition, "There is a general problem of leadership across the United States."[2] Very few people will aspire to such a role.

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[1] David L. Bradford & Allan R. Cohen, Managing for Excellence (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1984), p. 2.

[2] Clark Kerr, "Leadership Begins With Your President," AGB Reports. Vol 27, No 1 (January/February 1985), p. 24.

Those who do take the lead under such conditions will be doomed to failure by their own hands. Human efforts to be omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent are unusually destructive to human progress.

Perhaps the most common effect of the heroic image is the inability to delegate. Warning young business managers against this tendency, Loren Belker reminds us that:

> There are those who really believe that if you want something done right, you'd better do it yourself. People with this attitude rarely make good leaders because they have difficulty delegating responsibility.[1]

Having "sold the pasture to buy the horse," Belker's model delegates only trivial tasks that any idiot can perform. Like an octopus, his tentacles extend into every nook and cranny of the organization, sucking significance away from other people and to himself. The octopus is a victim of his own false image. He really believes that leaders must be omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. In the process, he destroys the morale of the very people on whom his leadership depends. He's got the horse, but the pasture is gone. That isn't good leadership, good management, or good anything else.

In my opinion, the current rush to disassociate leadership from management is unfortunate. The motivation is excellent, but the reasoning is faulty.

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[1]Loren B. Belker, The First Time Manager (New York: AMCOM, 1978), p. 6.

Examples abound, but in order to keep my complaint "in the family," let the reader examine an article in the Military Chaplains' Review entitled "Where Have All the Leaders Gone?"[1] The author proposes to clarify the differences between leadership and management by the use of two illustrations. But his illustrations actually contrast good and bad management techniques, showing heroic imagry at its destructive best.

If we hope to advance the cause of excellence in leadership, painting the mirror to alter the image will be of little assistance. With 750,000 words in its vocabulary, the English language has more words than any other language in the world. There is a word for every nuance, and we ought to use the right word for the right meaning. The words "leadership" and "management" are neither synonyms nor antonyms. They describe functions that are mutually supportive. Management rises to its best in the hands of a skillful leader. And leadership eventually collapses when organizational management is ignored.

Companion to the clouding properties of language misuse is the tendency to chop abstract ideas into concrete examples. So Michael Maccoby reduces his corporate leaders to four character types: craftsman, jungle fighter, company man, and gamesman.[2] Beyond his pretended scientific method, his

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[1]Ross B. Jackson, "Where Have All the Leaders Gone?," Military Chaplains' Review, DA Pam 165-133 (Spring 82), p. 13.

[2]Michael Maccoby, The Gamesman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

admitted prejudice, and his cynical approach to leadership, there is despair:

> During the past ten years, I have looked for leaders who bring out the best in people. I found none who satisfies the craving most people have. . . If such a person existed, he or she would not be ideal for the leadership needs of the 1980's and beyond; people oriented to self expression will resent submission to such authority.[1]

Is the "hunger for compelling and creative leadership" destined to remain unsatisfied? It will be if false images remain in the minds of those who lead and those who follow.

Even more disturbing, however, is the realization that false images leave us defenseless in the presence of power brokers. The world has known enough suffering and turmoil in our generation because leaders employed false images to advance themselves at the expense of others. It need not happen again. Let chaplains be among those who lead. Telling the truth. Setting people free.

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[1]Michael Maccoby, The Leader (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), p. 21

AWAKENING A SENSE OF LEADERSHIP

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail. - Abraham Maslow

Traditional definitions of leadership normally involve a listing of traits. Depending on the perspective of the definer, such lists are weighted toward the improvement of business management, the satisfaction of human needs, the success of political careers, the reaching of military objectives, or the recognition of ethical and religious concerns. The result is an incredible variety of definitions, leading one author to remark that "there are as many definitions as there are definers."[1]

Characteristic of all definitions is a certain tendency toward over-simplification. For the one who looks through an ethical and religious grid, leadership will be seen as a love for others, a life unfettered by selfishness, an ability to affirm the value of others, an awareness of spiritual dimensions, or elevation by the sovereign will of God.

If we are to understand and develope the leadership potential of chaplains more effectively in the future than in the past, it is absolutely essential that new and fresh thinking be encouraged. Traditional and simplistic definitions will never lift us to the level of leadership so badly needed today.

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[1]James J. Cribbin, Leadership: Strategies for Organizational Effectiveness (New York: AMACOM, 1981), p. 15.

In my opinion, one of the more liberating thinkers in the area of leadership is John W. Gardner. In a speech delivered at Independent Sector's annual meeting in October 1984, Gardner reminded his hearers that:

> In this society, leadership is dispersed to an extraordinary degree through all levels and all segments of the society. We are not only dependent on leadership at the top but on leadership that exists at many levels in government, business, labor, the professions, and so on. When we refer to our "system" we tend to forget the nation is made up of innumerable subsystems loosely related in ever-changing configurations, subsystems that sometimes mesh but often clash.[1]

Failure to recognize this kind of dispersed leadership causes us to miss significant opportunities to lead, and to encourage others to lead. There is, in the words of Gardner, a reduced "self-conscious sense of responsibility" on the part of leaders in American institutions:

> They lack a sense of their role as leaders, a sense of the obligations which they have incurred as a result of the eminence which they have achieved. They exercise the power but have no keen sense of exercising it.[2]

Perhaps this reduced "self-conscious sense" is also a result of our tendency to confuse leadership with power. Adolf Hitler called himself the Leader, but at a point in time he ceased being a leader and became a tyrant. The power to

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[1]John W. Gardner, "Pursuing Leadership: All Levels, All Types," AGB Reports. Vol 27, No 1 (Jan/Feb 1985), p. 39.

[2]John W. Gardner, Excellence (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 125.

control others is not leadership. As James MacGregor Burns observes, "A leader and a tyrant are polar opposites."[1] In the military context, there are many in the chain of command who do not know the difference between naked power wielding and leadership. By its very nature, the military system confuses leadership with control, and deadens the senses of its widely dispersed leadership.

Chaplains are in an excellent position to awaken this "sense" of leadership, both within and without the chain of command. Trained as teachers and counselors, skilled in the trade of human interaction, allowed to move freely within the system, chaplains ought to be among the best leaders we have.

According to Burns, the interaction of leaders and followers takes two fundamentally different forms. The first he calls transactional leadership, in which leaders and followers exchange gratifications in the marketplace. The second he calls transforming leadership:

> The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents.[2]

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[1] Burns, Leadership, p. 3.

[2] Ibid, p. 4.

The best form of leadership is transforming leadership, and it is readily available to chaplains. In fact, it is the very kind of leadership that chaplains are expected to provide. But we have accepted the systemic confusion of leadership with control, and lost our "self-conscious sense."

Before there can be a renaissance of leadership in the military system, I believe chaplains must be awakened to their own roles as transforming leaders. More than any other officer, the chaplain is able to model the difference between leadership and control, converting followers into leaders. Leaders into moral agents.

The initiative belongs to us.

THE MULTIPICATION FACTOR

We must make our young people aware of the many kinds of leaders and the many styles of leadership, and then encourage them to move toward the kind and style most appropriate for them.
-John W. Gardner

Generally speaking, there are three avenues of approach to leadership: emergence, election and appointment.[1] For those of us in the military chaplaincy, leadership normally begins with appointment to a position. Having met certain educational, denominational and physical criteria, chaplains are appointed as officers in the service of their country. A great tradition of leadership exists in the military services, and officers are expected to lead.

Prior to their appointment, however, very little attention has been given to the development of this important capability. American education is more concerned with the development of technical skills, not leadership skills. As a result, young people coming into business and industry are often surprised to learn that technical knowledge has very little to do with advancement. Their education prepared them for intellectual success, not institutional success.

Traditional and simplistic definitions of leadership are much to blame for this weakness in educational preparation. The identification of traits favors selection, not training. We continue to view leadership as a gift to be identified,

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[1]John Adair, Action Centered Leadership (England: McGraw-Hill Book Company, UK, 1973), p. 12.

not a talent to be learned. As one senior manager humorously wrote on the report of a junior, "Smith is not a born leader yet."

This is not to say that natural gifts do not exist, or that capacity for leadership does not vary from person to person. Such variation exists in all areas of human enterprise. For example, children vary in their learning ability to speak or read, and some will never do as well as others regardless of their training. But we do not let talking or reading occur naturally. We manipulate the environment to stimulate learning:

> Similarly, in the case of leadership: if we want it to occur, we cannot think of it as descending from on high onto particular persons. We must deliberately analyze and manipulate the environment to produce the desired response.[1]

Edward Wynne maintains that nearly every society can be evaluated on the basis of its leadership training programs for the young. Training structures may vary from society to society, but there are many parallels to be found in both ancient and modern cultures:

1. Leadership is learned by practicing the skills involved in increasingly realistic and complex situations.

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[1]Edward Wynne, "What About Teaching Leadership?" AGB Reports. Vol 26, No 2 (March/April 1984), p. 38.

A professor of education at the University of Illinois in Chicago, Edward Wynne is editor of Character II, a monthly periodical on public and private policies shaping American youth.

2. Older persons who are actively practicing those skills are the best teachers.

3. Constant reminders of rewards and punnishments are a powerful incentive to lead well.

4. The study of both able and inept leaders stimulates learners to preferred patterns of conduct.

5. Routine evaluations of emotion related criteria assist in the identification of those skills needing further development.[1]

More than any other institution, the Army has an obligation to train its leaders. While criticism of its training programs may be well-deserved on occasion, time has shown that military institutions teach leadership far better than their civilian counterparts. Current efforts to strengthen leadership within the Army may be illustrated by the most recent publication of FM22-100. The manual is a vast improvement over its predecessor, and should be expected to meet its goal of helping leaders who operate at the working level.[2] There are significant weaknesses, however. For instance, it perpetuates the myth that leadership exists only within the chain of command. In a section titled "The Need for Religion," the manual reveals a certain bias toward religion in general, and

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[1]Wynne, "What About Teaching Leadership?", AGB Reports, p. 40.

[2]FM22-100, 31 October 1983, p. 1.

chaplains in particular:

> Leaders, as well as chaplains, can assist soldiers by bolstering their spiritual strength and their conviction that they are doing the moral thing.[1] (emphasis mine)

John Gardner has rightly observed that the "tasks" of leadership" are not the same in every human environment.[2] The kind of leadership exercised by a political leader is very different from that of a business leader. The kind of leadership exercised by the leader of a combat patrol is very different from that exercised by a chaplain. The tasks are different, but the elements are the same. Leadership is widely dispersed throught the military system; leadership also enjoys great diversity.

When leaders with a variety of skills and styles are welded into a team, there is great potential for excellence beyond expectations. Teams must have leaders, of course, but the military system does not mandate one person in a solo performance that disregards all others.

Bradford and Cohen have studied several organizations with reputations for superior management, and report that where excellence soared, they saw:

1. Tremendous energy and commitment among subordinates.

2. A cohesive team.

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[1] FM22-100, p. 145.

[2] Gardner, "Pursuing Leadership: All Levels, All Types," AGB Reports, p. 41.

3. Rapid paced, problem solving meetings.

4. Spirited, healthy competition.

5. Belief in the abilities and intentions of subordinates.[1]

This is the excellence we must have. Meeting organizational requirements is not enough. When life hangs in the balance, military organizations cannot afford to meet written standards. They must do better than that.

Leadership is the "multipication factor" that lifts us beyond organizational requirements. It is not a solo performance, but a team effort, and the chaplain is part of the team. The system will not automatically accept chaplains in the role of leadership without challenge, and it should not.

It is time to insist that chaplains receive training as transforming leaders. We come to our positions by appointment, well-trained in technical skills, but poorly trained in organizational skills. Let chaplains who know how to lead, teach others how to lead.

It is time to multiply.

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[1]Bradford & Cohen, Managing for Excellence, p. 2

CONCLUSION

"You aren't a leader!" The words were like the back of a hand across my face. "I know it." My swift admission surprised even me, and suddenly all the fire was gone from our confrontation. My college roommate continued his angry tirade, but the words were somehow meaningless after the opening exchange. My mind seemed to float upward, filled with amazement and wonder.

I had just been elected vice president of the student body at the close of my sophomore year. He was older, experienced, popular, monied. I was young, without charisma, unknown because I worked long hours to pay school bills. He should have been chosen. Slowly the realization came to me. He wanted to be a recognized student leader, and the students had just chosen me instead of him. How did it happen? By all outward appearances, our roles should have been reversed.

After the confrontation was over, I began to walk away. "You shouldn't have talked like that to him." Someone was chiding my roommate. "But it's true!" he replied. "I know," returned the voice, "but you shouldn't have said it."

From that moment forward, I determined to learn more about the forces that brought me to leadership. I am still learning.

I have learned that the most unlikely persons rise to places of leadership. In most cases, emerging leaders represent a threat to established norms, so that existing power

bases are loath to even admit their existence. The most significant and persistent quality of emerging leaders is the capacity for independent thought. Whenever circumstances favor new ideas and new approaches, those who think for themselves will be found in the front. Leading.

To those with the courage to think for themselves, and find themselves in front of the crowd, this monograph is humbly dedicated.

O God, the King Eternal, who dividest the day from the darkness, and turnest the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far off from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep Thy law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that having done Thy will with cheerfulness while it was day, we may, when the night cometh, rejoice to give Thee thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- Book of Common Prayer

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